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**Private sector involvement in urban governance: The case of
Business Improvement Districts and Town Centre
Management partnerships in England**

Ian R. Cook

Department of Social Sciences, Northumbria University

ian.cook@northumbria.ac.uk

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Abstract

Although it has many merits, the voluminous literature on urban governance gives scant attention to the actual involvement and positioning of business elites and businesses within Public–Private Partnerships. There is also little consensus among academics as to why the private sector become involved in such schemes. This paper begins to address these issues through a critical empirical examination of how and why the private sector is involved with three English Town Centre Management (TCM) partnerships and the Business Improvement District (BID) subsidiaries all three partnerships have recently developed. In order to do this, the empirical study is guided by a conceptual framework that foregrounds the relationship between (a) the opening up and monitoring of ‘institutional space’ by partnerships and the state, and (b) the motivations and ‘constrained agency’ of the business elites. The paper demonstrates that the positioning of the private sector is more multifarious and fractured than previous studies of urban governance have suggested. It also reveals that business elites and businesses view their participation as an ‘investment’ that needs to accrue significant financial returns and that partnership and state officials are highly selective in their choice of ‘who governs’.

Keywords: Urban governance; Business elites; Political mobilization; Business Improvement Districts; Town Centre Management; England

1. Introduction

Geographers and academics in cognate disciplines have spent considerable time outlining the

emergence of Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) and the inclusion of business elites within contemporary urban governance (e.g. Imrie and Raco, 1999; Ward, 2000; Geddes, 2006).

They have also paid close attention to the problematic rolling out of speculative, entrepreneurial projects from place marketing to urban regeneration and their governance by the ‘new urban governors’ (e.g. Harvey, 1989; Raco, 2003a; Kavaratzis, 2007). These studies provide extremely useful accounts of the reconfiguration of urban politics and the nature of contemporary urbanism. Yet they tend to fall short on two fronts. First, they are often unclear how business elites and businesses are positioned within urban governance and, second, there is little consensus as to why business elites and businesses get involved.

Through an empirical examination of three English Town Centre Management (TCM) PPPs and the Business Improvement District (BID) subsidiaries all three TCM partnerships have developed, this paper offers a tentative insight into the positioning and motivations of the private sector in contemporary urban governance. This paper begins by critically reviewing the existing literature on the subject and developing a conceptual framework for understanding business involvement in urban governance. Using this framework, it then examines the positioning and motivation of businesses and business elites within TCM partnerships and their BID subsidiaries in Coventry, Plymouth and Reading. An empirical analysis of these case studies is useful in three respects. First, it vividly demonstrates the diverse inner-workings of two of the most-used and powerful PPP formations in England and the positioning of the private sector within these. Second, the comparative dimension of this study enables us to see the geographically hybrid nature of BIDs and TCM schemes, simultaneously stressing the commonalities and differences between these ‘actually-existing’ partnerships (Nijman, 2007; Ward, 2008). Third, these empirical insights can, and will, inform the conceptual points made by this paper.

Methodologically, this paper draws from semi-structured elite interviews conducted between January 2006 and January 2007. Interviews were conducted with four groups of actors, namely those involved in the national governance of TCM and BIDs; partnership staff and members of the three local partnerships; representatives of other institutions that worked closely with the partnerships; and a small number of business elites who had limited or fractured engagement with the local partnerships. In total, 49 interviews were conducted, each of whom were recorded, transcribed and encoded using the software package NVivo7. The case studies of CV One in Coventry, the Plymouth City Centre Company (hereafter Plymouth CCC) and Reading UK Community Interest Company (hereafter Reading UK CIC) were selected because of their differentiated TCM and BID organisational structures (as will be detailed later).

2. Reconstituting the local state

The local state has been heavily influenced and intertwined with the private sector. Focusing on England in particular, many of the practices and agendas of the local state have become more private sector-like. The local state, in the words of Phil Hubbard and Tim Hall, is “being run in a more businesslike manner” (Hubbard and Hall, 1998, p. 2), adopting “characteristics once distinctive to business – risk-taking, inventiveness, promotion and profit motivation” (Hall and Hubbard, 1996, p. 153). Their characterisation echoes the literature on the New Public Management (NPM) which identifies an increased emphasis by the state on competitiveness, accountability, efficiency, ‘hands-on’ auditing and benchmarking (the measuring and comparing of performance) and a move towards flatter hierarchies (e.g. Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Dibben and Higgins, 2004). However, the

emulation of private sector practices and mentalities, as Ward (2007a, pp. 7–8) notes, is an uneven and often unstructured process, varying between policy fields, organisations and places.

In addition, the local state has opened its doors to non-state actors and PPPs in the governance and delivery of ‘public’ services. For Jessop (1997, p. 37), a de-statisation of the state is taking place. For others, a shift from government to governance is underway (e.g. Ward, 2000; Kjær, 2009). Nonetheless, we should be careful not to see this as a clear-cut binary shift from one epoch to another. As Imrie and Raco (1999, 2001) insist, this transition is uneven spatially and temporally with non-elected elites and entrepreneurial tactics having longer (if somewhat hidden) histories in local government than first suspected (cf. Ward, 2000, 2001).

Under New Labour, there has been a partial and uneven emphasis on involving residents, the voluntary sector and ‘communities’ in urban governance (Raco and Flint, 2001; Atkinson, 2003; Geddes, 2006). However, it is the private sector and its business elites that have been the most actively welcomed ‘outsiders’ to the new governance structures.

Research has revealed five frequently-used strategies in which local government and its partners have sought to involve the private sector, namely: the contracting out of selected local state services (Szymanski and Wilkins, 1993; Grimshaw et al., 2002; Reimer, 2003; Higgins et al., 2005); the privatising of selected local state services and assets (Ginsburg, 2005); private financing for public and public–private services and buildings (Medway et al., 1999, 2000; Flinders, 2005, 2006); the use of private auditors, financial advisors and consultants (e.g. Saint-Martin, 1998; Shaoul et al., 2007); and the development of PPPs (Peck and Tickell, 1995; Flinders, 2005; Geddes, 2006). For Flinders (2006, p. 225) the

restructuring of who governs, delivers and finances public services has led to a blurring of the lines demarcating the public and private sectors with a substantial 'grey zone' emerging "where the public–private distinction becomes opaque and the established frameworks for ensuring legitimacy, accountability and control become less clear".

Beyond these observations, the urban governance literature is somewhat unclear about the positioning of private sector elites and institutions within these new structures. Wood (2004), for instance, argues that it is hard to decipher from the literature what private sector elites actually do when they sit on PPP boards or how they influence the partnerships' agendas. That said, a number of studies within the management studies tradition have provided partial insights into the internal operations of voluntary and nonprofit boards (e.g. Harris, 1996; Mole, 2003; Rochester, 2003). They have usefully examined, among other things, the tension and collaborations within the boardroom; the shifting division of labour between board members, chief executives and staff; and the ways in which decisions are made. However, while this literature is empirically rich, it rarely focuses on the external, multi-scalar pressures and influences facing the boards (Cornforth, 2003) or how these boards actively shape the wider processes of neoliberalisation (Wood, 2004).

Although it casts little light on the political roles and powers of the private sector, the urban governance literature does provide a few clues as to why they are involved. In two influential papers, Peck and Tickell (1995; Peck, 1995) reason that the contemporary political empowerment of the private sector is the result of centrally-orchestrated, neoliberal state restructuring whereby state power is strategically licensed out to the private sector. Behind this restructuring is the belief that business elites possess more appropriate, neo-liberal-like skills for the job (e.g. creativity, market expertise, efficiency) than the 'rule-bound' public

bureaucrats of local government (Peck, 1995; see also Farnsworth, 2006). Peck and Tickell, therefore, argue that business involvement should be seen as being “part and parcel of the process of state restructuring, not as some autonomous, grassroots revival of business paternalism” (Peck and Tickell, 1995, p. 76). Yet as Wood (2004, p. 2108) argues, their ‘state-centric approach’ cannot answer one fundamental question: “why, in the absence of compulsion, do businessmen and women answer the ‘call to arms?’”

Stone (1989) provides an indirect answer to this question. He argues that public and private institutions try to work together because of the deep-seated division of labour between the state and market in a fragmented, complex world. For Stone, no one group monopolises power and resources; therefore, policymakers and other elites actively seek to work with each other in order to fully realise their ambitions. However, this reasoning alone cannot explain the sharp rise in partnership working in the UK since the late 1980s.

According to Logan and Molotch (1987; Molotch, 1976, 1993) and Cox and Mair (1988, 1989), the thirst for profit maximisation is behind the political mobilisation of the private sector. For these authors, particular types of capital lead these partnerships, or ‘growth machines’ as Molotch (1976) calls them. Logan and Molotch pinpoint ‘rentiers’ (property owners) as the leaders of the growth machine. They argue that rentiers are ‘parochial capital’, whose assets are often geographically immobile or deep-rooted (e.g. buildings, land). As a result of this immobility, they either develop policies or lobby for policies that focus on intensifying or replacing existing land uses and attracting more mobile ‘metropolitan’ capital, in turn increasing land rent and property values. Similarly, Cox and Mair (1988, 1989) argue it is the extent of an institution’s local dependence – in other words, its relatively spatial immobility – that determines whether it will get involved in local economic development-

based coalitions or not (see also Imrie et al., 1995). As Cox and Mair (1988, p. 310) contend:

“[T]he primary interest of locally dependent firms is in defending or enhancing the flow of value through a specific locality: the territory that defines for them a geographically circumscribed content of exchange relations critical to their reproduction; and that, for reasons ranging from the immobility of their built environment facilities to the non-substitutable character of their exchange relations, is difficult to reconstitute elsewhere. Locally dependent firms [therefore] engage in collective strategies via business coalitions in order to realize their common interests in a particular area, interests that are antagonistic to those of locally dependent firms in other places.”

Unlike Logan and Molotch, Cox and Mair do not suggest that property owners are the leaders in such a movement but do hint at their involvement alongside other locally dependent businesses such as financial institutions, public utilities and the local media.

Logan and Molotch (1987) also argue that property owners are supported by other business interests who may benefit directly from real estate (e.g. construction, planning industries) or from increased consumption as a result of the redevelopment (e.g. retailers and the local media) (cf. Thomas, 1994). These observations reflect Peck's (1995) wider insight that certain fractions of capital are more involved in, and encouraged to be involved in, urban governance than others.

Wood and colleagues (Wood et al., 1998; Wood, 2004), however, are unconvinced that material interests easily translate into local political activity in the way that Cox and Mair imply. In a study of local business political mobilisation in Barnsley, Accrington and Macclesfield, they reason that “the creation of local business agendas may be simply one

among a number of avenues through which businesses seek to realise their interests in the locality” (Wood et al., 1998, p. 22). They also point out that ‘locally dependent’ businesses may not always have common, complementary or coherent interests and agendas (see also Peck, 1995; Raco, 2003b). More crucially, they argue that local dependence alone does not explain private sector mobilisation and involvement. Rather as Wood (2004, p. 2112, *emphasis in original*) reveals: “the ties between firm characteristics and the extent and nature of their political activity [are] complex and variable. For the most part, the motivations driving engagement [are] not readily reducible to any simple set of commercial dependencies on the locality.”

Wood and colleagues (Wood et al., 1998; Valler et al., 2000; North et al., 2001; Wood, 2004) also criticise the inattention to business agendas and agency within the ‘state-centric’ understandings of urban governance which focus on the creation of ‘institutional space’ for the private sector and the extra-local pressures on local PPPs. A more productive avenue of research, they argue, is to analyse the formative actions of business elites, business organisations and business agendas. For them, attention should be placed on three aspects: “local business interest[s] and business organisations; the process of ‘business interest’ formation; and the subsequent deployment of business agendas by organisations both independently and within wider institutional fora” (Wood et al., 1998, p. 17). However, while their empirical analyses provide useful insights into the creation of business agendas, it fails to show the processes through which business agendas actually enter into public policy arenas. Perhaps unwittingly, business agenda formation and public policy formation appear as very separate spheres.

On reflection then, some important insights have been made into the inclusion of the private

sector within the ‘new urban politics’ (Cox, 1993). However, there remains little consensus as to why they get involved or what they actually do within urban governance. In order to understand these issues better, we need to take seriously the structuration of urban governance, highlighting the interconnectedness of structure and agency, business and state. No longer should we excessively privilege one side of these dualisms, leaving the other side neglected (Giddens, 1984; Valler and Wood, 2004; Gregson, 2005). Urban governance, after all, is shaped by “the interaction of a strategically selective context that privileges certain forms of interests and activities, and strategic actors who continually examine the options open to them in pursuing their various interests” (Valler and Wood, 2004, p. 1837, *emphasis added*). In concrete terms then, analyses of urban governance should pay particular attention to the relationship between (a) the selective opening up and monitoring of institutional space by the state and other institutions and (b) the agendas, ‘constrained agency’ and motivations of the business elites. Using this conceptual framework, this paper will now look at the positioning of the private sector within three Town Centre Management (TCM) partnerships in Coventry, Plymouth and Reading and their motivations for taking part.

3. The introduction of Town Centre Management and Business Improvement

District partnerships

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a significant growth in the number of PPPs governing urban centres in England. The most prominent of these are TCM schemes and BIDs. TCM schemes and BIDs share similar characteristics and genealogies. Both are partnership-based and focused on creating conducive conditions for business profitability (Ward, 2007b). They seek to encourage more visitors, more investors and more sales, while fending off the

increasing competition from elsewhere (e.g. out-of-town shopping centres, rival urban centres, business parks, retail parks). Both partnership-types attempt this by improving the public realm of their centres, often through mundane, routine services such as street cleaning, horticultural enhancements, CCTV monitoring and mobile security patrols (Mitchell, 2008; Cook, 2010). Many also seek to liaise with potential investors directly or attract them through promotional materials such as websites and newspaper advertisements (Warnaby et al., 2005).

Neither BIDs nor TCM schemes are unique to England. TCM-like schemes are increasingly common in Australia and several European countries including France, Italy, Sweden and Spain (Forsberg et al., 1999; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009). BIDs, meanwhile, first emerged in North America and spread into New Zealand and South Africa and pockets of Western and Central Europe, notably Albania, Germany, Ireland, Serbia and the UK (Cook, 2008; Morçöl et al., 2008). The development of TCM in England, beginning in the late 1980s, was somewhat independent of the emergence of TCM-like schemes outside of the UK. In contrast, the introduction of BIDs in England during the early-to-mid 2000s drew on experiences elsewhere through a selective policy transfer from the United States where the New Labour government and Association of Town Centre Management perceived BIDs to be key players in the regeneration of once-depressed downtowns (Cook, 2008).¹

There are five other important differences between BIDs and TCM schemes. First, although both partnership-types receive mixed levels of public sector funding, the two have diverging private sector funding arrangements. English BIDs are funded primarily by a mandatory, multi-year tax on business occupiers, while TCM schemes receive only voluntary payments

¹ For critical overviews of the experience of BIDs in the US see Briffault (1999) and Mitchell (2008).

from the private sector. The difference is important, not least because BIDs were introduced to help rectify the inadequate levels of private sector TCM funding (low levels of private sector donations were seen to be the result of the voluntary nature of private sector funding that allowed many businesses to ‘free-ride’ on others’ donations). Second, rather than being replacements of TCM, BIDs are frequently extensions to TCM schemes, often existing as sub-committees of TCM companies. Third, although a number of stand-alone BIDs are emerging, very few are in urban centres and the majority of these are in out-of-centre industrial estates and business parks – places that TCM has not emerged. Fourth, reflecting in part the much earlier introduction of TCM schemes, there are, at the time of writing, considerably more TCM schemes than BIDs in operation in England, with 81 BIDs and over 500 TCM schemes in November 2008 (www.atcm.org; www.ukbids.org).² Fifth, business occupiers are allowed to vote on whether or not BIDs can be established in their district, an opportunity not available to businesses if a TCM scheme is planned in their district.

Between 1987 and 1996, TCM emerged in the urban centres of Coventry, Plymouth and Reading amid uncertain economic conditions. Beginning in the 1970s deindustrialisation was destructively underway in Plymouth, Reading and, perhaps most painfully, Coventry where jobs in manufacturing were being, and continue to be, lost at a staggering rate in a once thriving city which promoted itself as the car manufacturing centre of the UK (see, for instance, [Healey and Dunham, 1994](#)). In addition to deindustrialisation, Plymouth was contending with a rapidly contracting dockyard that it depended upon for local employment ([Bishop, 1991](#)). In contrast to Plymouth and Coventry, Reading’s economy was able to

² TCM schemes and BIDs have also developed in other parts of the UK. However, BIDs only went ‘live’ in Scotland in 2008 (following the development of BIDs legislation and regulations by the Scottish Executive) and, at the time of writing, BIDs have yet to be legislated in Northern Ireland.

mitigate the economic problems of its declining manufacturing sector primarily through the influx of new information technology, insurance and financial firms to the town (Raco, 2004). Reading's growing professional sector, however, could not mask the problems of its town centre which, like city centres of Coventry and Plymouth, was suffering from fluctuating levels of consumer spending and increased competition from new business parks, retail parks and rival centres. The controlling elites within the three councils felt that in order to bring economic regeneration, "feeding the downtown monster", in the words of Harvey (2000, p. 141), was required. But they felt increasingly unable to do so by themselves.

Establishing TCM, it was felt, would enable business elites to help them achieve this. After all, the private sector operated day-in, day-out in the centres, and better knew the needs of business and the ways to attract customers and investment. Developing TCM also meant that several sought-after central government regeneration grants, which were only available to PPPs, became accessible. The rolling out of TCM was also structured by the wider embrace, nationally and locally, of neoliberal ideologies which made speculative and partnership-based schemes such as TCM politically desirable (Lloyd and Peel, 2008). TCM was in the spirit of the times.

The three TCM schemes have all evolved, acquiring new services, new private sector-led management boards and company status. By early 2005, CV One was responsible for a variety of 'street services' including car park management, CCTV monitoring, street trading licensing, street lighting maintenance, street cleaning, landscaping and the maintenance of the city centre public spaces. Following a merger with Coventry and Warwickshire Promotions, it also had responsibility for events management as well as promoting Coventry and the wider county of Warwickshire as a tourist destination. Plymouth CCC in early 2005 was also responsible for encouraging inward investment, street trading licensing and city

centre street wardens. Reading UK CIC, meanwhile, was responsible for strategic planning and attracting inward investment but did not deliver any 'on-the-ground' street services.

Many of these services in the three partnerships were simply transferred from their respective councils (while continuing to be paid for by the councils), although a small number of services have been started up by the companies, often funded by non-council grants.

Table 1. Partnership structures, operations and funding.

	CV One	Plymouth CCC	Reading UK CIC
Establishment of TCM and BID	Appointment of City Centre Janitor in 1987. TCM company formed in 1997. Merged with Coventry and Warwickshire Promotions in 2002. BID established in 2005	Informal TCM board established in 1996. City Centre Manager appointed in 1998. BID established in 2005	Town Centre Manager appointed 1989. TCM board established in mid-1990s. BID established in 2006. Evolution into town-wide economic development company in 2007
Legal status	Not-for-profit company limited-by-guarantee (from 1997)	Not-for-profit company limited-by-guarantee (from 2004)	Community Interest Company (CIC) (from 2006)
Relationship between TCM and BID tables	BID committee reports to TCM board	One board focusing on all TCM and BID issues	BID committee reports to CIC board. The Reading Market Group, Local Economy Group and Staff Committee also report to CIC board
Major TCM operations	Car park management, street cleansing, landscaping, toilet cleaning, street trading licensing, retail radio and PubWatch, events management, marketing, CCTV monitoring, business development, Customer Service Assistants	CCTV monitoring, street cleaning, street trading licensing, events management, marketing	Strategic planning, marketing, inward investment and business support
Major BID operations	Evening Ambassadors, rapid response cleaning team, landscaping, Christmas lights, marketing	Free membership to Plymouth Against Retail Crime (PARC) initiative, landscaping, cleaning, Christmas lights, signage and CCTV installation, PCSO match-funding	Street washing, graffiti removal, Christmas lighting, marketing, PCSO match-funding
2007/08 funding	Approx. £9.7m including £6.3m grant from City Council and £286,000 from BID levy	Approx. £660,000 including £256,000 from BID levy, £292,000 from City Council and £105,000 from property owners	Approx. £550,000 including £275,000 from BID levy and £42,000 from Borough Council
BID assessment formula	0.9 percent of rateable value with 33 percent discount for businesses within shopping centres	1 percent of rateable value	1 percent of rateable value excluding shopping centre businesses that do not have street-facing shop front

Source: Partnership websites, interviews conducted and personal communication

Each of the three TCM schemes developed BIDs and these were introduced in April 2005 (CV One, Plymouth CCC) and April 2006 (Reading UK CIC). As detailed in [Table 1](#), additional services have been financed and governed by the BIDs, such as street cleaning, mobile patrols and Christmas lights by CV One and Plymouth CCC. The BID levy, furthermore, has allowed Reading UK CIC to provide on-the-ground street services for the first time. However, their BID services has been limited to the provision of twice-yearly power washing of the streets, the match-funding of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), graffiti removal, Christmas lights provision, additional marketing and CCTV signage. TCM services continue to be provided alongside the newer BID services. Furthermore, all three companies have added to their non-BID funded service portfolios since the rolling out of BIDs, adding services such as street cleaning and city-wide CCTV monitoring (Plymouth CCC) and city-wide economic development and tourism services (Reading UK CIC).

4. Positioning business and business elites within BIDs and TCM

Since their inceptions, officials and supporters have frequently cited the partnerships' abilities to successfully and rightfully empower the private sector. For instance, one Reading UK CIC official interviewed (#2, July 2006) claimed that: "the fundamental principle is that the BID in Reading is 100% business-led". Relatedly, it is frequently suggested that BIDs and TCM are simultaneously by business and for business. Going beyond the discourse, it is possible to identify 10 core, yet overlapping, positions that businesses and business elites have taken up, not always voluntarily, inside and outside of the partnerships. As [Table 2](#) demonstrates, these positions can be divided into three heuristic categories: internal

facilitators (creators, governors, service providers), external facilitators (voters, funders, lobbyists, consultees) and recipients (service users, representees and beneficiaries). Many of these positions are not new to businesses in England who have been ‘courted’ by other partnership bodies since the early 1980s. However, the positioning of external businesses as voters is unique to BIDs, as is the positioning of businesses as mandatory funders. As TCM and BIDs have drawn upon old partnership-business relations and developed new relations, this paper will now focus in depth on one old relation (business as governors) and one new relation (business as voters). By doing this, the paper can provide a more detailed insight into the different ways in which businesses and business elites are approached and positioned within urban governance and the reasons behind their involvement.

Table 2. The multiple positions of business and business elites within BIDs and TCM.

Internal facilitators	External facilitators	Recipients
<i>Creators.</i> Businesses can directly help establish both partnership-types (e.g. through financing and governing their introduction).	<i>Voters.</i> Business occupiers are allowed to vote to establish or reject a BID in their district. Businesses cannot vote on proposed TCM schemes.	<i>Service users.</i> A number of TCM and BID services are solely provided for businesses within their districts (e.g. retail radios, business forums).
<i>Governors.</i> Businesses can sit on committees and boards within both partnership-types making decisions about what services are provided, by whom and how.	<i>Funders.</i> Businesses can voluntarily fund both partnership-types. If a BID is voted in, business occupiers must pay a BID levy. Other business types (e.g. property owners) do not pay the levy.	<i>Representees.</i> TCM schemes and BIDs often liaise with and lobby councils, funding bodies and other organisations to gain favourable decisions for businesses in their district.
<i>Service deliverers.</i> By governing TCM and BIDs, business elites can indirectly provide services for business in their area. If services are contracted out, profit-making firms can deliver these.	<i>Lobbyists.</i> Businesses can actively encourage both partnership-types to alter, introduce, reject or dismantle a policy or service. They can also request that TCM and BIDs represents them in other institutional decision-making settings. <i>Consultees.</i> Businesses can be consulted on policies and services	<i>Beneficiaries.</i> Businesses can benefit directly and indirectly from (a) the services provided to them, customers and investors, and (b) the representation offered by both partnership-types. The benefits will not be guaranteed or evenly distributed.

in BIDs and TCM (e.g. through business forums). Businesses are especially consulted over the content of BID business plans.

4.1. Business as governors

Across the three partnerships, there are eight decision-making tables (including boards of directors and representative committees which operate under the board of directors), all of whom have private sector representatives. Plymouth CCC has one board governing all TCM and BID activities while CV One has a board responsible for pre-existing TCM functions and a BID committee responsible for overseeing the BID services. Within Reading UK CIC, there are four committees (for marketing, economic development, the BID and staff matters) that are accountable to the board of directors.

As [Table 3](#) shows, the decision-making tables are made up of a mixture of partnership staff and representatives from the private and public sectors. All tables feature public sector officials with councils the most frequently represented institution. Nonetheless, the vast majority of members are from the private sector, almost all of these being representatives of companies that have physical assets (such as stores or property) within the associated districts. Retailers dominate some boards (e.g. the Reading UK CIC BID committee) but are less prevalent on others (e.g. CV One board of directors). Property owners are often well represented on most boards but absent on CV One's BID committee and Reading UK CIC's BID committee. With a few exceptions, independent businesses, industry and office-based businesses are under-represented on the eight tables with 'shop-floor' workers and trade unions completely absent. Reflecting wider patterns in local governance structures (see [Tickell and Peck, 1996](#); [Robinson and Shaw, 2003](#)), the tables are dominated by white,

middle-aged, middle-class men; exceptions are rare.

The table members across the three partnerships are responsible for making major ‘in-house’ decisions primarily through board and committee meetings. In Coventry and Reading, BID committee members are responsible for making delegated decisions regarding the delivery of the BID services. Day-to-day management of the partnerships is devolved to the manager and staff in the three partnerships, and they are accountable to the committee and board members. The committee members at CV One and Reading UK CIC are also accountable to board members. Apart from the day-to-day partnership staff on the boards and committees, the public and private representatives consider their positions to be part-time attending less than a handful of meetings a year. Compared to their ‘day jobs’, the hours spent in the capacities of partnership members are very limited. Reflecting the corporatisation of the three partnerships, the members’ roles have morphed over time moving away from advisors to their respective councils to making important decisions themselves. There is a degree of variation between the roles on the three boards, due to, among other things, the nature of the services provided, the mentalities and vested interests of the members, and the finances available. Nevertheless, the private sector members across the three partnerships and eight tables share three core responsibilities (cf. Harris, 1996; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004, p. 21).